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ALCOHOL EDUCATION RESOLUTION NOTED

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The Office of Pastoral Development of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church has issued a statement on "The Church and Alcoholism" in response to a resolution approved by the Church's General Convention in 1979 calling for alcohol education throughout the Church.

The Convention resolution requested each of the dioceses of the Episcopal Church to form a representative committee on alcoholism, composed of both clergy and laity and both recovering alcoholics and non-alcoholics if possible. Each diocesan committee is charged to develop a written policy on alcoholism which would emphasize education, prevention, intervention and treatment.

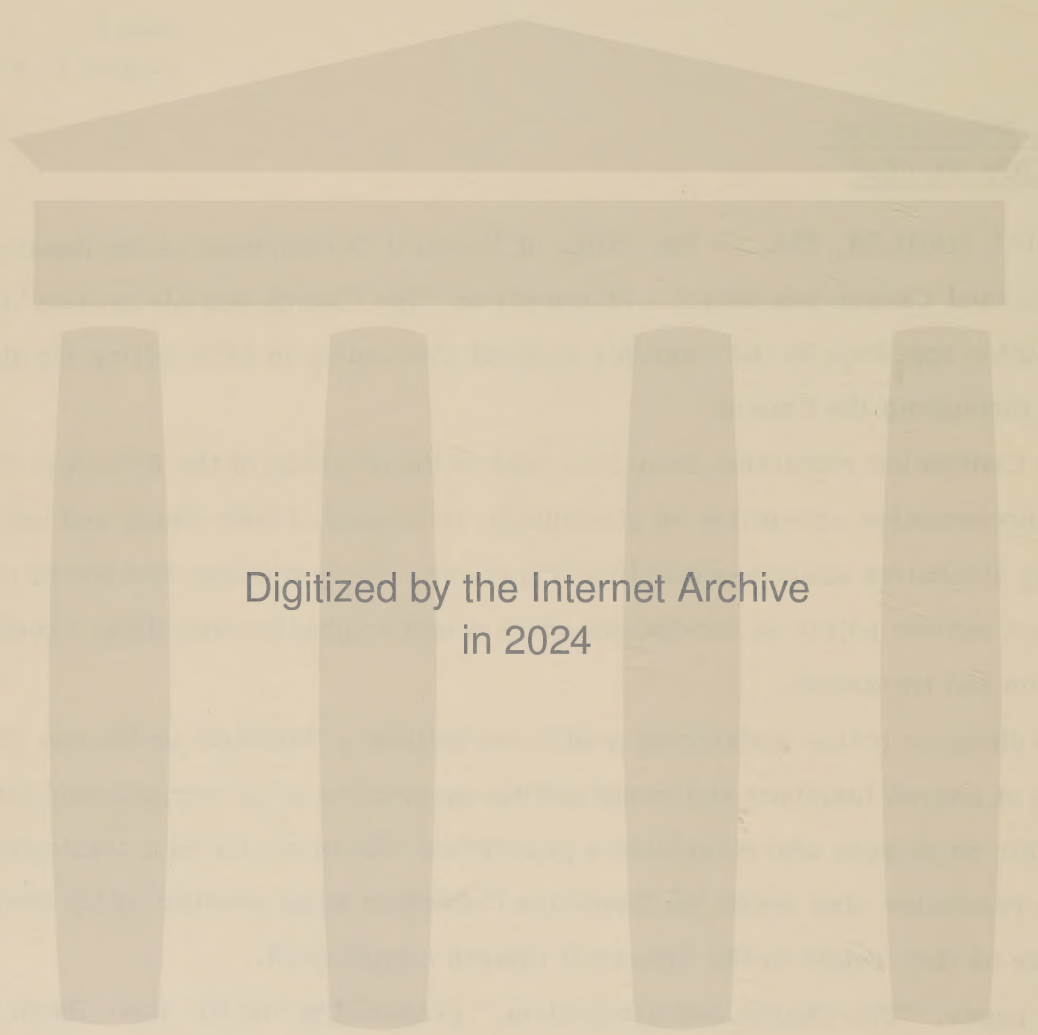
The diocesan policy statements would also include a statement on the use of alcoholic beverages at church functions and would outline assurances of job security and insurance coverage for employees who completed a prescribed course of alcoholic treatment if required.

The resolution also asked the Executive Council to adopt similar policy statements as appropriate as they relate to the Episcopal Church Center staff.

The paper, "The Church and Alcoholism," prepared by the Rt. Rev. David E. Richards, Director of the Office of Pastoral Development, cites two major reasons for the Church to assist the problem drinker and his or her family: a humanitarian concern for those stricken with a disease and a concern for the life of the spirit.

Bishop Richards points the Church to "the sacred obligation to minister to the sick and to those in trouble." For this reason, he says, "It is most appropriate for religious bodies to take leadership and responsibility in articulating policy and collaborating in action plans in the field of alcohol education and treatment."

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He says that it should be "obvious to us that the person who develops a drinking problem and falls victim to this form of chemical dependency is actually using 'spirits' as a way of helping him to resolve his own need to grow in the spirit. . . . For many people 'spirits' are the destructive counterparts of a spiritual force which they desperately need and without which they may literally die."

Bishop Richards notes that Alcoholics Anonymous gives priority to "a person's need for a spiritual power, and this has proved to be the most effective way of helping many people overcome their dependence on 'spirits.'"

"Alcoholism is clearly a spiritual disorder."

The statement says that the Church's "record is discouraging and unimpressive. . . . Better efforts should be made."

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Attachment: The text of the statement from Bishop Richards and the Office of Pastoral Development is attached.

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The Church and Alcoholism

David E. Richards

Is there a good reason for any church to become seriously involved in alcohol education and in working for the development of both preventive and treatment facilities for the problem drinker? On what theological basis or rationale could a religious body justify the use of its material resources and facilities in this area?

The first and strongest reason for coming to the aid of the problem drinker and his or her family is the clear humanitarian injunction stated to us so plainly by Our Lord Jesus Himself in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Those who are injured by accident, disease, or criminal violence are all persons for whom we are obligated to express concern and love.

Alcoholism is the inevitable result of problem drinking. By all accepted medical and social standards, alcoholism is a describable and treatable illness. Medically it causes a variety of physical disorders. Psychologically it breaks morale and destroys personality. It is an area in which greater efforts toward prevention and increased skill in healing are required. For this reason it is most appropriate for religious bodies to take leadership and responsibility in articulating policy and collaborating in action plans in the field of alcohol education and treatment.

In addition to the sacred obligation to minister to the sick and to those in trouble there is a further special reason for a religious body to concern itself with the illness of alcoholism. Religion is concerned about the things of the spirit. Its principal function -- though often neglected -- is to help people understand the life of the spirit and to live by the spirit. It is true that, generally, human beings cannot realize the development of their spiritual lives nor achieve their spiritual destinies if they are oppressed, deprived and so inhibited that they are dehumanized. Spiritualization is critically limited by such a prevailing state of dehumanization. Persons who are dehumanized lack capacity for spiritual growth. For the poor, the illiterate, the oppressed, the suppressed minorities and the handicapped there is a need for humanizing services. In our society these services are being provided up to a certain point.

In spite of some glaring deficiencies, our North American culture and society is for vast numbers of persons humane and humanizing. For many the opportunity for spiritual growth is potentially present, but for many this growth never occurs. Nongrowers sometimes become simple hedonists. Some, to quote Thoreau, live their lives in "quiet desperation." Some manifest signs of emotional disequilibrium. Others take to drink.

Beverage alcohol has always been referred to as "spirits" and this should help make it obvious to us that the person who develops a drinking problem and falls victim to this form of chemical dependency is actually using "spirits" as a way of helping him to resolve his own need to grow in the spirit. The misuse of "spirits" occurs because an individual has spiritual hungers and spiritual needs that remain unfulfilled. For many people "spirits" are the destructive counterparts of a spiritual force which they desperately need and without which they may literally die.

It is for this reason A.A. first of all dealt with a person's need for a spiritual power, and this has proved to be the most effective way of helping many people overcome their dependence on "spirits."

Alcoholism is clearly a spiritual disorder. In all of its long history the Church has failed to recognize that religious forces uniquely possess the key to solving the problem and even more importantly religious bodies possess the means for preventing and controlling this particular disease.

To date our record is discouraging and unimpressive. Social agencies, the medical profession, psychology, rehabilitation services, and Alcoholics Anonymous all have labored vigorously with the best tools available to them. Occasionally the Church has made a feeble effort to be relevant and often has derived enormous and disproportionate satisfaction, for example, from granting permission to an AA group to use its facilities. I submit that this is really not significant involvement.

Better efforts should be made. Our Spirit is better than the spirits supplied at a handsome profit by American Distilleries. Why can't we actually prove that this is the case?

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DP, DX

